



St. Mary's Of the Assumption

*In the
Canadian
Rockies*

**BANFF
ALBERTA
CANADA**

It is a laudable endeavor to enshrine the history and achievements of a parish in a booklet and keep fresh the memory of the good things of the past. The story of St. Mary's, Banff, is closely related to the beginnings of the Church on the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rockies. The parish has erected a church, which is a tribute to God's glory and an adornment to its mountain setting. May this booklet serve the worthy purpose of recording and publishing this fascinating history and magnificent achievement.

+ *Francis P. Carroll*
Bishop of Calgary

Calgary, July 27, 1962



BISHOP'S RESIDENCE
910-7 A Street N. West
Calgary - Alberta



A Welcome

"And God saw all He had made, and found it good."

Genesis 1:31

God saw the mountains and the plains and the rivers and lakes and found that they were good. God's creatures, through travel, are seeing today that which God saw at Creation. And they, also, find it to be good.

God made this majestic scenery for His creatures, for their pleasure and as a reflection of His Greatness. As you enjoy the magnificent beauty of the mountains, may you be led to a greater appreciation of and love for God, the creator of all things.

This little brochure is intended as a welcome for you to St. Mary's Parish in Banff and as a guide to unfold the symbolism contained in the many works of art in the church. Herein, too, is the story of St. Mary's as well as that of Catholicism in this region.

Finally, it is meant to act as a reminder to you of the Glory of God and the many ways in which this glory is revealed to us.

May God bless, protect and refresh you on your journey.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Paul J. O'Byrne,
Parish Priest

Father Robert James McGuinness



Rev. Fr. Robert J. McGuinness (left) with Canada's Governor-General Georges P. Vanier, on the occasion of the latter's visit to Banff in 1961.

St. Mary's Church of the Assumption in Banff stands as a monument to the generosity of thousands of Catholics (and others) who have visited Banff over the years, and to the generosity of its own parishioners.

But mainly it represents the realization of a dream of one man, Reverend Father Robert James McGuinness, who ministered to the needs of the Faithful here from 1936 to his death in 1961.

Father McGuinness was born in Liverpool, England, in 1886 and came to Canada with his family in 1890. He obtained his early schooling in this country and in Europe and was in the employ of the federal government in Alberta when the First World War started. He served overseas with the 29th Battalion CRTS and on his return to Canada entered the architectural service of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. In this capacity he worked on design of the Banff Springs Hotel and was resident architectural engineer during its construction. This was to be his last job as a layman.

Always a deeply religious man, he decided in 1926 that he wanted to become a priest. He went to Rome for his seminary training and four years later he was ordained, saying his first Mass in the church of St. John Lateran.

Coming back to Canada, he served in various positions in the Calgary diocese before being made pastor at Banff, July 27, 1936, a position he was to hold until his death.

Father McGuinness first visited Banff as a youth and from the time of that visit his dream was to erect a church here in keeping with the magnificent surroundings. It was not until 1951 that he was able to begin making his dream come true.

Parishioners and visitors alike will recall his oft-spoken desire "to build a church which will combine classic church architecture with magnificent mountain scenery to the honour of God."

Most would agree that this talented yet humble priest succeeded completely in realizing his objective.

A Manifestation of God's Power

Your visit to the Rocky Mountain area of Canada has brought you many magnificent scenic vistas, all of which are manifestations of the greatness of Almighty God whose power is evidenced in these creations. It is most fitting that a centre of worship has been established in the midst of all this scenic grandeur — a centre where the visitor might stop to express to God some measure of gratitude and appreciation for the material and spiritual benefits He has accorded us.

The church, through its architectural structure, mosaics, stained glass windows and many other works of art, tells a silent story that aids us materially in an appreciation of our faith. In St. Mary's the old and the new are effectively blended with the surrounding mountainous region to help us realize the timelessness and universality of our religion. As an illustration, consider the stained glass windows which show early events in the history of the Church against a background of familiar mountain scenes around Banff. The Nativity window, for instance, depicts the Birth of Christ with a local mountain scene as a backdrop. All of us realize of course that the event did not take place in exactly these circumstances but we realize equally well that the event in Bethlehem two thousand years ago was every bit as real for this area now as it was for the world of that time.

The atmosphere of St. Mary's is conducive to a mood of prayer in appreciation of God's goodness to mankind and we are moved to acknowledge Him and seek His blessings for ourselves and our families.

Features of Construction

In keeping with the mountainous region it serves, St. Mary's Church is constructed largely of rock taken from the mountains around Banff. The vein of rock from which the exterior of the church was built is located six miles southwest of Eisenhower Junction leading to the Banff-Windermere Highway. Father McGuinness first observed this vein in 1913 and from that time on, kept it in mind for the purpose which was eventually accomplished. The basic material for the rockwork is "gneiss," a rock unlike others in the mountain area in that it is extremely hard, and therefore long-lasting.

Actual quarrying of the rock was done by a parishioner, Mr. Ulysse La Casse, a longtime resident of the Banff area. Mr. La Casse had no easy task obtaining sufficient quantities of gneiss for the church since blasting was not practical and all the work had to be done with sledgehammer and crowbar . . . plus a great output of physical energy. Quarrying was accomplished in two six-month periods over a space of two years and back-breaking work it must have been; the fractured rock had to be carried up from a pit by hand for placing on a truck and subsequent transportation some 26 miles to Banff.

Thickness of the walls is from six to eight inches and the weight of the rock is 3200 pounds per yard.

Interior walls are of brick from Medicine Hat in the southeast part of the diocese. Wood in the interior, including the pews, is oak.

The Stained Glass Windows

One of the outstanding features of the church is the profusion of stained glass windows. All were fabricated in Innsbruck, Austria, by the 100-year-old firm of Glasmalerei und Mosaik-Anstalt, universally recognized as leaders in their field thanks to the fine craftsmanship of their workmen, most of whom have spent their entire lives at this exacting trade. These men start from a full-size drawing of a window: a counter-drawing for the lead lines is made and colored glass is fitted in and soldered. The glass comes from France and Germany.

Designs for the windows were made by Father McGuinness.

The windows symbolize mysteries of the Rosary in which Our Lady is mentioned. On entering the church, the first window on the Epistle side is a representation of the Annunciation. The background of this window features the Spray Valley and Mount Rundle, as they might be seen from the Mount Norquay Chairlift.

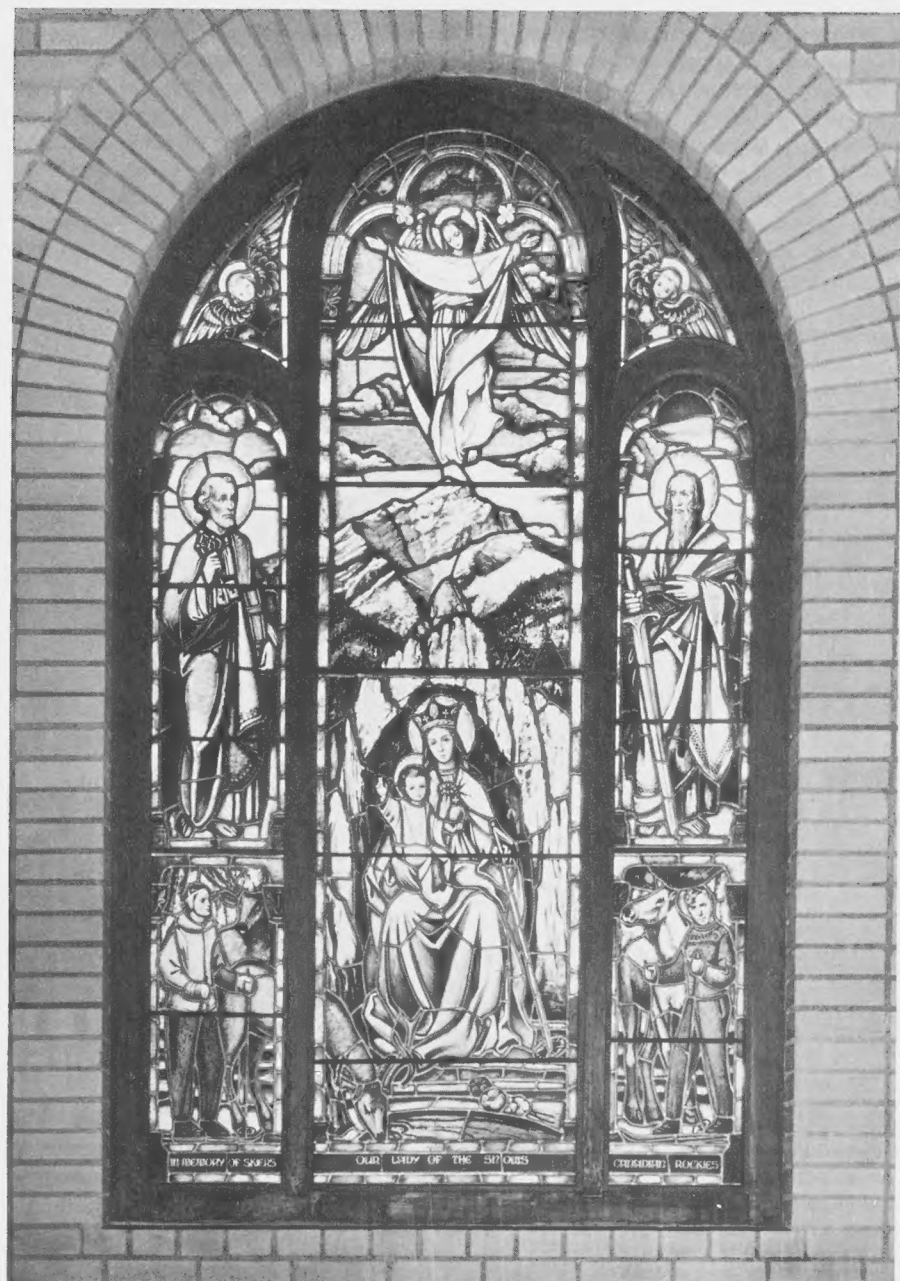
The Nativity window next features Our Lady, St. Joseph and the Infant Christ. The Infant is shown lying on a sheaf of wheat — particularly appropriate for the Diocese of Calgary since many of the faithful of this diocese derive their livelihood through wheat farming. The mountain scene in this window is the view to be had looking west towards the Massive Range as one crosses the Bow River bridge. It will be noted that the Star shining over the stable is the Star of David — in recognition of the fact that the window was donated by a Jewish citizen of the community.

The large window at the back of the church depicts the Crucifixion scene, the figures being those of Our Lord, St. John the Evangelist, Our Lady and Mary Magdalene, all before the background of the City of Jerusalem.

The first window on the Gospel side as the church is entered is of the Immaculate Conception. It is set in the Lake Louise area with Mount Lefroy, the lake itself and Victoria Glacier shown in the scene. Next is that of the Assumption. The setting is that to be seen from the Banff Springs Hotel with the Bow Valley in the foreground and the mountains of the Fairholme Range thrusting skywards at the back. The third window represents the Crowning of Our Lady in Heaven and the setting here is Mount Assiniboine, a towering peak southwest of Banff often referred to as "The Matterhorn of North America."

Banff is rapidly growing in stature as a winter resort and of the hundreds of thousands of summer visitors, many come back to savor the thrills of some of the finest ski slopes on the continent. The final window dedicated to Mary is that of Our Lady of the Snows. Central theme is the concern of Our Lady for the safety of skiers. At top is a Guardian Angel while the young Christ holds the world in His hands. The Blessed Virgin is seated on a structure of ice somewhat akin to that which decorates the Bow River during wintertime. To the left is the image of St. Peter and to the right of St. Paul. The skiers pictured are Hans Schneider and Rudy Maat, both formerly well-known in this area. The whole scene is before the background of Cascade Mountain as seen looking north along Banff Avenue.

Upon leaving the church by the main entrance, one observes a



window dedicated to St. Christopher. The scene is that of the saint crossing the water carrying Christ who became increasingly heavier and did not identify Himself until they were safely on the other side. It turns the thought of the traveller to his patron saint and to the importance of having Christ travelling with him.

The Main Altar

The Main Altar in the church is of marble from Austrian quarries owned for centuries by the Archbishops of Salzburg. Worked in mosaic on the face of the altar are the words *O Salutaris Hostia* (O Saving Victim). At the peak of the side columns are the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, symbolizing God as the beginning and end of all things.

Directly behind the main altar is a window dedicated to the Holy Spirit and this window is a duplicate of the window above the Main Altar of St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

The large mosaic on the Gospel side shows Our Lord making St. Peter the visible head of the Church, symbolized in the power of the



keys. The first part of the Latin text: "Thou Art Peter and Upon This Rock I Will Build My Church" appeared at the top of this mosaic with the second part of the text being continued on the Epistle side. This latter mosaic pictures an exercise of St. Peter's supreme jurisdiction, when his successor, St. Pius X, established the diocese of Calgary. The mosaic shows the first bishop, Most Rev. John T. McNally, kneeling before St. Pius X, with Cardinal Merry del Val, Swiss and Noble Guards, and a Papal Chamberlain in attendance.

These mosaics illustrate the work of Christ from the moment he made St. Peter his Vicar on earth and commanded him "Go Therefore and

Teach All Nations" through to St. Pius, the successor of St. Peter, carrying out this command and exercising the same authority for the spiritual benefit of the citizens of Southern Alberta. St. Pius created the Diocese of Southern Alberta in 1912.

The stained glass windows on the sides of the main altar are memorials to the history of the Church in the area of Banff and the Rocky Mountains. On the Epistle side are pictured the early missionaries who participated in the beginnings of local church history. Included are Rev. Peter DeSmet, S.J., apostle of the Indians of Idaho and Montana; Rev. Leon Doucet, O.M.I., the first white man to reside on the site of the City of Calgary; Rev. Albert Lacombe, O.M.I., whose patron saint finds a place in the name of the Province of Alberta; Bishop Grandin, the first bishop of the province; Rev. H. Leduc, O.M.I., and Rev. M. Claude, O.M.I. The three Indian tribes evangelized by these missionaries, the Blackfoot, Blood and Peigans, are also represented along with the original log cabin church of St. Mary's in Banff.

The window on the Gospel side contains the history of the present



St. Mary's by picturing the church officials in charge at the time of its erection. Surrounding Pope Pius XII whose coat of arms appears on the left are three Cardinals who visited Banff shortly before the church construction: Cardinal McGuigan of Canada, Cardinal Griffin of England and Cardinal Gilroy of Australia; shown too are Cardinal Antoniutti, Apostolic Delegate to Canada at the time, and Bishop Francis P. Carroll, Bishop of the diocese at the time of the church construction. Father McGuinness, the parish priest, is represented in the lower right hand corner by the coat of arms of his alma mater, St. Laurence College,

Ampleforth, England. Also shown is Cardinal Tisserant, Dean of the College of Cardinals at the time.

Individual-figure mosaics represent St. John the Evangelist with an eagle in flight, symbolizing the soaring to lofty heights of St. John in the spiritual realm through his explanations of the teachings of Christ; St. Luke, St. Jerome and St. Augustine, all towering figures in the early history of the Church.

The Side Altars

The Altar of Our Lady of Fatima stands before mosaics of two angels based on those modelled by Fra Angelico. Next is the Altar of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus identified by the words *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum*. Candle stands on both these altars are modelled after cups used to hold candles in the catacombs in order to bring light while Mass was being said in these underground areas in the early centuries.

The St. Frances Cabrini Altar

The altar of Mother Cabrini, to the right of the main altar, is dedicated to the first canonized citizen of the United States — a nun famed



for the many institutions she built for the sick and the needy. The statue of Mother Cabrini is of Carrara marble from Italy and the altar

is not yet complete since marble has yet to be placed around it, similar to the other altars in the church. The window opposite this altar depicts Leo XIII asking Mother Cabrini to go to the United States. Above the head of St. Frances Cabrini are candles and a cross, symbolic of the dedication of her life to the care of the sick.

The Stations

Another remarkable feature of the church is the exceptionally fine workmanship in the Stations of the Cross. Truly a work of art, these stations were carved by Walter Bacher, of Innsbruck, Austria, and one of their more interesting aspects lies in the fact that they are carved out of wood which becomes progressively darker as The Way of the Cross



proceeds. Only exception occurs when there is a sign of kindness shown to Christ as when He meets the women of Jerusalem. The darker hue becomes more pronounced as we near the Crucifixion and Death but then becomes lighter as the Body of Christ is removed from the Cross and buried. Facial expressions are truly remarkable and it is apparent that Mr. Bacher was an artist of outstanding talent. The stations were carved from lindenwood.

The Metal Work

The church is further enhanced by the excellence of metal work

within its walls. This work was carried out by the Irish firm of Gunning and Sons, of Dublin.

Founded in the last half of the 19th century, this is another firm with a tradition of fine craftsmanship and its work is to be found in Catholic churches around the world. Its reputation for quality is upheld by the fine examples here.

All the fittings are wrought by hand — gates, baptistry rail and grill, candle sticks, all in the finest bronze with lacquer finish. Relief work is done in 24-carat gold and the enamel work on the altar candles is laid on sterling silver. As with the stained glass windows, designs were drawn by Father McGuinness.

The Marble

Marble in the church comes from Austria and from Italy.

Pedestals, cover plates and sockets for the Communion rail are of Rot-Scheck marble from Innsbruck. Set plates for the steps, all wall sockets and facings and the frame of the back wall of the main altar are of red Adnet marble. The columns for the main altar and the Sacred Heart altar are of red-green Tropf marble and the plates for the back wall of the Sacred Heart altar are of Calacata marble from Carrara, Italy. All other works are of light and reddish Untersberg marble from the Archbishop of Salzburg's quarries.

These various marbles have been and are still being used in the construction of churches in Austria and Southern Germany, and many other countries in the world, viz.: cathedrals in Salzburg, Linz and Vienna. The work was carried out by Marmor-Industrie-Kiefer in Austria on data given by Father McGuinness.

Construction of the Church

First sod for the new church was turned by Father McGuinness on Wednesday, November 29, 1950. Contractor for the structure was Lar-Will Construction, a Banff firm. Construction work began on December 9th and the wall structure was completed by the following July. On July 24th, 1951, the cornerstone was laid by Rt. Rev. A. J. Hetherington, P.A., Vicar-General of the diocese, assisted by Father McGuinness, Very Rev. J. Le Fort, C.S., Calgary, and Rev. T. J. McCann, Toronto. During construction, Father McGuinness buried in the altar foundation relics of the soutanes worn by St. Pius X and by Rev. C. Tessier, O.M.I., a friend of Father McGuinness and his priestly ideal, a man who had labored in the Arctic regions for a quarter of a century; along with these relics were placed medals of St. Teresa of Lisieux, a gift from Pope Pius XI, of the 1950 Holy Year and of Pope Pius XII, as well as earth from St. Peter's, Rome.

Construction was sufficiently advanced to permit use of the church for Divine Service by the end of 1951. The first Mass was offered by Father McGuinness at Christmas midnight of that year.

Rt. Rev. A. J. Hetherington officiated at the solemn blessing and dedication on August 17, 1952, when the title "Assumption of the Blessed Virgin" was given the church — now known popularly as St. Mary's.

The Consecration of the main altar, the altar of St. Frances Cabrini and of the Sacred Heart was performed by the Most Rev. Francis P. Carroll, Bishop of Calgary, on July 5, 1962. The relics placed in the altars were: the main altar, St. Clement, first pope and martyr, and St. Silverius; Sacred Heart altar: St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr, and St. Stephen, the first martyr; St. Frances Cabrini: St. Innocent and St. Agnes.

The stained glass windows were placed in position September 12, 1953, and the Stations of the Cross were installed in December of the same year. Marble and mosaics were placed in December, 1960. (The installation of marble was by Mr. Michael Pawchuk of Calgary.)

Plans for the Future

Plans looking toward completion of St. Mary's include the following:

- ☆ Erection of a bell tower.
- ☆ Construction of a parish centre.
- ☆ Completion of marble work in the church by placing marble on the St. Cabrini altar, and facing of the baptistry with marble.

The financial assistance given by visitors to the parish will further these final plans as well as help maintain and operate the parish.

Catholicism in the Rockies

The Catholic Church entered the Rockies in 1833 when two secular priests from Quebec, Fathers N. Blanchet and M. Demers, were sent at the request of a Hudson's Bay Company factor to minister to the spiritual needs of the company's employees at Fort Vancouver, Washington, U.S.A. After making the intrepid journey across the whole expanse of Canada by waterways and portage, they entered the Rockies by way of the Athabasca Pass (now traversed by the Banff-Jasper Highway some 140 miles north of Banff). When they reached the Continental Divide at the Committee Punch Bowl, they offered their Masses at three o'clock in the morning of October 10, 1833.

These were the first Masses to be offered in the Rockies.

Awed by the grandeur of the scenery and impressed by the magnificent setting of their altar in the midst of God's own Creation, the two priests consecrated the mountains to Almighty God. Continuing their journey, they reached a boat encampment at the northern end of what is now the Big Bend Highway and began a long, perilous journey down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. In 1843, Father Blanchet became the first Bishop of Oregon Territory, while Father Demers was appointed first Bishop of Victoria (1847).

Almost 45 years were to elapse after the first Masses on the Con-

tinental Divide before Mass came to the Banff area itself. The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway was the instrument of God's Providence. The Oblate missionaries, now fully established in Calgary, visited the railway construction camps at regular intervals and on Saturday, October 13, 1883, at a site about 150 yards northwest of the point where the present Banff-Calgary highway intersects the railroad, Father P. Claude, O.M.I., said Mass after a tiring two-day horseback journey from the end of the railroad line, Kananaskis, about 55 miles west of Calgary.

Father Claude's diary records that Mass was said at the camp of a Mr. Madigan and later he rode seven miles further west to the camp of a Mr. LaFrance. There, the workmen from neighboring camps assembled for Sunday Mass, after which the good father continued his journey west to the camp of a Mr. Galigar (probably Gallagher) at the site of the present Hillsdale where he found four houses, a number of tents and a store.

Pursuing his westward course he "was astonished to find a thriving town known as Silver City" (below Mt. Eisenhower). A dozen houses were already occupied, more were a-building and the town was being



Fr. McGuinness, W. E. Round and a Park Warden with "The Hermit of Castle Mountain" in 1937

divided into lots. (Only slight traces of this silver-mining town now remain.) Among the names of the residents of Silver City of October, 1883, left for us by Father Claude, one is of interest: James (better known as Joe) Smith, the Hermit of Castle Mountain, who lived in a hut on the site until October 18, 1937, when he was removed by Father McGuinness and park officers for transfer to the Lacombe Home. Mr. Smith was the third man to come to Silver City in its heyday; he was the last to leave. It is of interest that the Bishop of Calgary, Most Rev. Francis P. Carroll, visited Joe Smith in his abode near Castle Mountain (now Mt

Eisenhower) shortly before the hermit's removal to Lacombe Home.

Father Claude remained at Silver City for the best part of a month and records that during the afternoon of November 11 he visited the "hospital," a boxcar on a siding, and administered the last sacraments to a man gravely ill, who died later that day, the first recorded death in this valley.

Moving forward with a vanguard of workers, Father Claude went through Kicking Horse Pass, Columbia Valley and part of Rogers' Pass. On his return journey the following May, he stopped off at Silver City to see Father Remas, who had been sent to minister to the workmen. He was dumbfounded to find Father Remas and all the rest of the inhabitants gone — all but Joe Smith, that is. It developed that the silver "mine" had been salted by a couple of slick promoters from Montana who had decamped with the funds they had gained through selling stock in the non-existent lode.

A DeSmet Interlude

Father Peter DeSmet, Jesuit missionary, was sent from St. Louis, Missouri, in 1840 to evangelize the Indians in the northwest United States. He met with considerable success with the Flathead Indians in the area now known as Idaho, but the Blackfoot Indians from Southern Alberta, rated among the most uncivilized of all Indians, engaged in periodic and destructive raids on his missions.

Father DeSmet determined to end this opposition by constituting himself as ambassador of peace.

So he set out northwards in 1845 and became the man for whom White Man's Pass is named. Father DeSmet travelled over 1,000 miles on foot through difficult mountain terrain, accompanied only by an Indian guide. The trip took him a year and he failed to negotiate a peace with the Blackfoot . . . for he did not encounter them.

Yet Father DeSmet's intrepid journey through wild country was not wasted. When he crossed the summit of what was to become known as White Man's Pass, he became the first priest to enter the area which is today the diocese of Calgary. The pass, located at the south end of Mount Rundle, and overlooking the present town of Canmore, led him to a band of Assiniboine Indians, wandering far from their lands and searching for food. The zeal of an apostle was aroused and he set about their evangelization and helping them find food. Thus, he celebrated the first Catholic functions, gave the first baptisms and made the first Christians in Southern Alberta.

The First St. Mary's

The Oblates continued to designate various priests to visit the construction camps and settlements as they sprang up. Fathers Leduc and

He also established the first parishes in the area, among them, St. Mary's of Banff. He was the first Bishop to administer the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Confirmation in the area and to introduce into it the first Sisters for hospitals and schools.

The saintly bishop died in 1902 and his cause for beatification and canonization was begun almost immediately. It has advanced steadily and successfully since.

May our prayers obtain from God the necessary miracles to allow his elevation to the altars of the Church.

Sisters of St. Martha

No story of Catholicism in the Rockies would be complete without some reference to the Sisters of St. Martha who, in 1960, marked the 30th anniversary of their arrival in Banff.

The Sisters came here to operate a hospital for the community and for almost 20 years they were continuously confronted with the task of trying to make an old and inadequate structure conform to present-day



hospital needs. After many trials and countless headaches, the Sisters were finally able to provide people of this area with a modern, million-dollar hospital.

This fine institution, situated near the Bow River across the bridge from the main part of the townsite, has been built and financed by the Sisters and is being operated according to the highest possible standards with a view to furnishing the best possible patient care to the sick and injured.

It is a source of special satisfaction to the Sisters that the townspeople have accorded them full support and co-operation during the past three decades and they look forward to continuing happy relations with the community of Banff.



Traveller's Prayer

"Let us Pray" O God, who didst cause the children of Israel to pass dry of foot through the midst of the sea, and by the guidance of a star didst make clear the way that leads to Thee: grant us, we beg of Thee a safe journey and tranquil weather, so that in company with Thy holy angel we may arrive safely not only at our present destination, but finally at the haven of eternal salvation.

